



## **A Wedding Gift** **Isaiah 62:1-5; John 2:1-11** **Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (January 16, 2022)**

A policeman pulls over a driver who drives erratically. Upon approaching the driver, he notices it is a priest. Nonetheless, the cop is undeterred as it should be, and asks him to show driving license and registration. The priest dutifully complies, but the policeman detects alcohol in his breath. So, he asks him “Reverend, have you been drinking?” Reply: “Just water, officer.” Policeman: “Then why do I smell wine?” Priest: “Good Lord! He’s done it again!”

The miracle at Cana in Galilee is a well-known story and only appears in the gospel of John. It is the first sign reported by John. Signs are meant as an indication of a greater reality. If the miracle is great, what about the miracle maker?

I can almost picture the day. There is much joy and laughter, light conversations and teasing as you would normally see at a wedding. Children running around and adults dancing and enjoying themselves. One can almost hear the noise. Relatives, neighbors, and friends traveling from near and far join the marrying couple in the grand celebration which lasted several days and required much preparation and food supplies.<sup>1</sup>

The amount of food provided, brought in by relatives and friends, was a sign of the groom’s family network and social connections: it was a sign of social standing and appreciation. To run out of food or wine before the end of the celebrations would be a dishonorable offense. It would be a breach of hospitality that the guests would remember for years.

The focal point of the story seems to be the lack of wine. John sounds rather stark when he announces, “the wine gave out.” (v. 3) Mother Mary must have noticed the gasp and worried look on the host’s face as servants come to whisper the dreadful news in his ear. She catches on rapidly and turns to the one she knows who can fix this.

I imagine Mary pulling her distracted son away from his friends, away from the music and the dancing, taking Jesus into an inner room, locking eyes with a stern stare, and whispering the shameful news into his ear: “They have no wine.”

It sounds at first as bad news, a story about scarcity. But it’s actually a story about the abundance of friends and family gathered for a wedding feast. It is about joy and celebration and family and pleasure and hospitality. Jesus gets that and wants to extend that with a gift of his own which reflects the nature of God’s generosity for humanity. Jesus provides between 120-180 gallons of choice wine just to keep the party going. It’s not just enough wine; it’s way more than enough. Such is the nature of the God we worship.

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<sup>1</sup> [What were common marriage customs in Bible times? | GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/What-were-common-marriage-customs-in-Bible-times/)

But he doesn't do that without resisting Mary's request. "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." (v. 4) Jesus is no fool; he knows that his countdown to crucifixion will begin as soon as he makes his true identity known. His reply sounds harsh and draws a line between Jesus and his mother but is a common Semitic practice of declaring an agreement to disagree.<sup>2</sup> His hour, after all, is something that Jesus needs to work out with his Father and is revealed at the proper time.

Mary's reaction is equally surprising. She doesn't cave in the face of his reluctance; she continues to stress the urgency of the need. As if to say, "I don't know anything about your 'hour': there's a desperate problem, right here, right now. Change your plans. Hasten the hour. Empathy first. She doesn't argue with him, and no words are needed. A look is all it takes.

She turns to the servants and instructs them to do what he says with a special hint not to argue with what he is about to ask. She doesn't wait to hear the specifics of Jesus's plan. She is confident and trusts the one she has known for thirty odd years. She's watched him grow. She remembers the words of Gabriel, Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna.

The instructions to the servants come swiftly: fill up the water jars with water.

"John speaks of six jars, a number that also appears in the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman who had six husbands. The number signifies imperfection, something incomplete. For the Samaritan woman, the seventh husband will be the true husband, the one that speaks to her: Jesus himself. In the same way, the seventh jar will be the side of the Crucified Christ, from which water and blood flows."<sup>3</sup> The encounter with God will bring salvation.

The water jars meant for Jewish purification rituals have completed their job. They are sitting there empty, cold, unused, and useless. Jesus repurposes them for a greater scope. Not only does he give wine; he gives the best wine.

Because that's what God does. God surprises us with extravagant generosity when we run to God scared, empty handed, and with cold in our stony hearts.

And Mary is part of the picture, noticing life, noticing our fear and panic attacks. She speaks up on behalf of those who are in need. She may not be saying anymore "They have no wine." She might be saying now: "They have no home." "She has no cure." "He has no friends." "They have lost everything." Many experience helplessness in life. She notices and she speaks up. How good it is to have a friend in Mary!

Mary's confidence in speaking up comes from knowing the source of her trust. She asks because she believes. She trusts so she expects.

The servants' task isn't easy. There's no running water in the ancient world, and those stone jars are huge. How many trips to the well, how much arm strength, how deep a resolve! It is Mary's faith that helps the servants persevere when they feel bewildered and ridiculous. It must have taken them a good while to fill those jars. Yet, they keep going, minute after minute, bucket after bucket, practicing themselves the obedience that leads them to trust.

The servants will soon find out, as will the steward and the bridegroom, that Yahweh is not about scarcity but sweet abundance. And we are here to remind ourselves that when we face the agony

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<sup>2</sup> Francis J. Maloney, *The Gospel of John*, p. 71

<sup>3</sup> [The Real Reason The Wine Ran Out At Cana | Catholic Bible Study \(catholic-link.org\)](http://catholic-link.org)

of scarcity, loss, and need, we can count on the God who hears the cry of the poor. We may very well be aware of the empty water jars in our life (chronic illness, physical pain, financial trouble, systemic injustice) but we can listen and obey in faith to Mary's encouragement: "Do whatever he tells you."

Let us live in confident hope. Let us put our trust in the one whose help we seek. Because he is good. He is generous. He is Love. Amen.